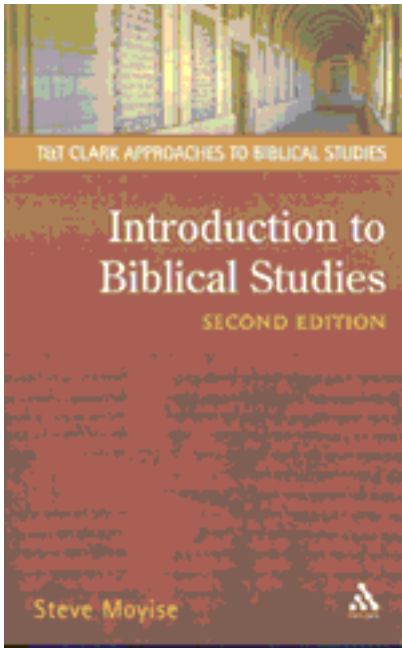


RBL 07/2005



Moyise, Steve

Introduction to Biblical Studies

Second edition

T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies

London: T&T Clark, 2004. Pp. x + 136. Paper. \$33.95.
ISBN 0567083977.

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Moyise directs his *Introduction to Biblical Studies* to those who are new to the field of biblical criticism in order to demonstrate succinctly that biblical studies is a multifaceted discipline. He highlights some of the various approaches to biblical interpretation and its key proponents and fleshes out his discussion with biblical examples. While attributing the emergence of various approaches to biblical studies to the inadequacies of preceding approaches, Moyise maintains that each approach has something to contribute and therefore presents each approach in as positive a light as possible with minimal critique. Though he acknowledges that the various approaches are not always compatible, he nevertheless recognizes that they illuminate aspects of a passage that might otherwise be unclear (117).

In the second edition, Moyise slightly expands his discussion of the original 1998 edition and includes additional chapters. He adds a chapter on theological approaches to biblical studies and splits two other chapters, with expanded discussion. Another change is in inclusion of three questions at the end of each chapter—the first two questions test the reader's comprehension, while the third question focuses on a biblical passage or exercise and is designed primarily for group discussion.

Chapter 1 (“God and the Bible”) explores what it means to say that the Bible is the word of the Lord and how that belief differentiates the Bible from human writings. Moyise suggests that there are four functions of the Bible being the word of God: (1) to inform the reader of things one could not know otherwise; (2) to teach humanity how it is to live through the examples of Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Paul, and others; (3) to reveal the story of salvation; and (4) to enable the reader to experience God. Within his discussion of the Bible providing knowledge, Moyise observes some of the weaknesses with fundamentalism, or a literal interpretation, and provides texts that illustrate the weaknesses inherent in this form of interpretation.

Moyise begins his examination of the various approaches in chapter 2 (“Historical Approaches: The Search for Sources”) by focusing on the emergence of historical criticism and source criticism. After defining historical criticism and outlining its rationale, Moyise provides examples of scholars attempting to reconstruct the history of several scriptural passages. He summarizes the JEDP hypothesis and its weaknesses by examining the authorship of the Pentateuch, the two creation accounts, the flood story, the two versions of the Ten Commandments, and the story of Joseph’s betrayal. In the next section of the chapter, Moyise discusses the relationship between the Gospels and the differences between their accounts of the crucifixion and baptism. He concludes the chapter with a summary of the quest for the historical Jesus and the work of Schweitzer and C. H. Dodd.

Chapters 3–6 continue Moyise’s analysis of the available approaches to biblical criticism. The third chapter (“Historical Approaches: The Search for Context”) discusses three approaches that seek to discover the text’s original context (*Sitz im Leben*): “history of religions” school, form criticism, and social-scientific criticism. Included among these topics are the importance of having a thorough knowledge of the ancient Near East, the work of Gunkel and Mowinckel on the Psalms; the work of Schmidt, Dibelius, and Bultmann on the Gospels; the Jesus Seminar and the work by Funk and Borg; and the honor-shame culture within social-scientific criticism. Chapter 4 (“Historical Approaches: The Search for Intentions”) examines redaction criticism in the Synoptic Gospels and Conzelmann’s work, the Q hypothesis, and the purposes of Mark and John. Moyise surveys textual criticism and the reasons for different translations in the fifth chapter (“Historical Approaches: The Text of the Bible”). After defining Byzantine and Alexandrian manuscripts, the principles of textual criticism (*lectio brevior*, *lectio difficilior*, and early attestation), the Masoretic Text, and the Qumran manuscripts, Moyise demonstrates the use of textual criticism in Mark and Luke’s account of Gethsemane, John 1:18, Gen 4:8, Isa 53:9–11, and Ps 2:8–9. Chapter 6 (“Literary Approaches: How Do Texts Affect Readers?”) focuses on reader-response criticism and rhetorical criticism. Moyise highlights the four reasons why biblical stories have such a

dramatic impact on readers, as suggested by Thiselton: biblical stories (1) catch the reader off-guard (e.g., 2 Sam 12 and the parable of the Good Samaritan); (2) embody truth in people/characters (e.g., John 13); (3) stimulate imagination; and (4) invite participation by a narrator who guides the reader through the story (e.g., John's Gospel).

Moyise devotes chapters 7 and 8 to the role of the reader and how the reader's background, interests, and commitments influence his interpretation of the Bible. Chapter 7 ("The Role of Readers: Gender, Ethnicity and Social Location") explores how one's gender, ethnicity, and social location affect how one interprets Scripture. His discussion of gender centers on feminist interpretation's aim of retrieving women's voices in the Bible, retrieving the feminine imagery used of God, and reinterpreting biblical stories from the woman's perspective (e.g., John 4:4-42). The remainder of the chapter summarizes the work by E. P. Sanders, who attempts to reconstruct first-century Judaism, and the interpretations of liberation theologians.

Chapter 8 ("The Role of Readers: Reading against the Grain") considers whether certain passages in the Bible promote sexism, racism, and imperialism. He also examines several approaches that resist these types of interpretation by reversing the modern interpreter's "distorting lens." Moyise continues his discussion of feminist interpretation, which challenges stereotypical roles and inflammatory language used to characterize evil as feminine, and liberation theology, which seeks to contextualize Scripture. In addition, Moyise mentions several postmodern developments in the theory of literature: questions about textual stability, deconstructive criticism, and intertextuality.

The final chapter ("Theological Approaches") discusses those approaches that interpret the Bible as sacred Scripture. These interpretations include the evangelical interpretation, christological interpretation, ecclesiocentric interpretation, canonical interpretation, and trinitarian interpretation.

While Moyise has successfully written a concise introduction to biblical criticism, the mere brevity of the treatment nonetheless presents itself with weaknesses. For instance, Moyise needs to expand his assessment of the approaches. Sometimes he ends a section with a quote and omits assessing a method's usefulness. He generally offers little or no comment on how well received each perspective scholar is in the wider New Testament or Old Testament field. In addition, Moyise could have included more recent scholarly works and topics of debate, such as the Roman imperial order within his discussion of social-scientific criticism. Other minor criticisms pertain to the further reading sections. In the fifth chapter Moyise includes Thomas's book *How to Choose a Bible Version*, even though he "profoundly" disagrees with Thomas's conclusions. If Moyise's targeted audience is students who may not have the tools to critique Thomas, then he should have

cited a work that he generally agrees with. Furthermore, it would be helpful for introductory students if more dictionary articles and essays were listed rather than books, since they would be more manageable to read.

Moyise's book differs from other biblical criticism introductory works in that he takes a minimalist approach. He provides brush strokes of biblical criticism since the Enlightenment. Moyise presents one or a few key scholars under each critical method and summarizes their work succinctly. The book contains no footnotes or endnotes to bog down the reader with unnecessary detail. His goal was "to produce a short, user-friendly book," and he has done just that. If a perspective reader wants a book that presents the topic of biblical criticism in a simplistic manner, then this book is appropriate; if, however, the reader requires a thorough history and critical treatment of biblical scholarship, then this book is not appropriate.